

## America has a 'moral obligation' to look after the welfare of Filipino veterans

[Cong. Tom Lantos, Mar 28, 2007](#)

In early April, the Philippine Consulate General in San Francisco will join the Veterans War Memorial Commission to host an event entitled "The Day of Valor." It is being held to honor the heroism of both Filipino and American World War II veterans who fought in Bataan and Corregidor, and who later joined the resistance against the Japanese forces in the Philippines.

While it is heartwarming to know that their actions are remembered locally and abroad, it is simply disgraceful that heroes like them, who fought gallantly to defend freedom against tyranny, are treated as somehow second-class by our federal government. They do not receive the same benefits and pensions as our other veterans do. They deserve far more than the occasional, ceremonial day of recognition. They deserve the dignity of equal treatment for their sacrifice. Justice in this matter has long been too long delayed.

Congress must ensure that our Filipino American veterans receive the support that is afforded to the American forces with whom they fought and suffered.

Last year, I co-sponsored a successful resolution that recognized and honored Filipino World War II veterans for their defense of democratic ideals and their important contribution to the outcome of World War II. I also supported legislation to provide full pensions and benefits to those Filipinos who had proved themselves ready to make the ultimate sacrifice; unfortunately, this bill was unsuccessful. But it deserves a renewed effort: The brave soldiers who served in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines or the Recognized Guerilla Forces under the authority of the U.S. Army should receive the same benefits that those who served in the 101st Airborne have.

It is long past time to remedy the egregious slights and tremendous injustice Filipino American veterans have faced since the end of World War II; Congress simply must pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act this year. I hope the legislation advances soon as it comes under review by the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. We need to bring this matter up for a vote in the House of Representatives.

Although the pool of people affected by this legislation continues to recede with time, there still remain thousands of Filipino Americans and many thousands in the Philippines who could be eligible to benefit from this legislation.

Filipino Americans, many of whom are my constituents and neighbors, often approach me to tell me their story of hardship or their family members' lack of care because of a simple designation that was put into law separating one class of Filipino veteran from another. As one who survived the Second World War, I know well what their sacrifices meant, and I deeply empathize with them.

Filipino soldiers were indispensable to the protection of freedom during the Second World War. They played a critical role in stopping the Japanese advance throughout the Pacific. During three long years of Japanese occupation, Filipinos helped to liberate their homeland and ultimately to defeat the Japanese war machine.

In 1946, President Harry Truman stated that during World War II, Philippine soldiers "fought with courage under the most difficult conditions," and declared that it was the "moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Philippine Army veterans."

This promise remains unfulfilled, and our moral obligation remains unmet. Congress must finally make good on President Truman's promise and pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act.

We must honor the sense of *kapwa* that is at the heart of the Filipino American community, an ineffable term with no simple translation in English but which is easily understood as a kindred sense that honors our fellow beings - not just in a ceremonial way, but as an expression of shared identity.

While we can never fully repay our veterans for the sacrifices made on our behalf, we can take a major and long-overdue step toward providing them with the care and compensation they so richly deserve.

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